

The Church on the Housing Estate by Trevor Lockwood
Mission and Ministry on the Urban Estate
(Methodist Church Home Mission 1993)

1. The Estate and its People

Causes:

1. Lloyd George: houses for heroes
2. Accommodation for workers
3. Severe housing shortage and extensive waiting lists.

Now over 6 million. Near enough stopped in 70s and 80s so real Estate period is from 1920s to 1970s.

Surprise how big! Dagenham 6-8 square miles, 80,000 pop, 70K were council. Most estates between 5K and 50K.

Some parkland and spacious, some locked in towers, concrete jungles – hell to live there.

Usually plain and functional design. 50s and 60s maisonettes to enhance style. Never expected to aspire so Avey no garage space so clogged with parked vehicles. No amenities. Planners often hoped to transplant culture with people – Sheffield City Corp moved them street by street together. Little public transport. Pub, Club, Church only facilities.

Afraid to answer door – vandalism & crime – rabbit warrens. Toilet stairwells, dangerous access, don't want high-rise unlike Germany. Forget your purse and no lift!? High-Rise Blues. Good view.

Points systems: Young marrieds and singles into towers till they gain points.

1981 Right to Buy: put mark on house because I matter. Housing Action Trusts improve property then hike the rents so demography changes. Sold on to first time buyers with jobs.

Working Class: you are identified with group that does not have privilege or wealth of upper class, nor the business and intellectual ability of middle class, primarily manual workers, weekly paid. Defines by social lives and habits. Credit has increased debt plus vulnerable to unemployment.

One phase housing: Filled as they were built so demography is layered. Grow up and can't find a local place so share or move away till old folk died. Numbers of elderly can rocket with able gone. Multiple deprivation but amazingly cheerful. Not stoical but full lives – “no superficial masks – “their humanity has been fashioned on the anvil of pain, sacrifice and need.” Process of gaining trust before this comes through.

2. The Church on the Estate

Varied from denomination to denomination. RC built large Irish schools/plant. CofE parish hall & Church. Baptists emphasised worship so large seaters. Methodists: used extant village churches and ethos problems. In Dagenham the large central hall idea used, with Sunday School of 1K between wars. Restrictive Covenants tied down future. Many on edge of cities and vulnerable to bombing. Became centres of caring in war but Welfare State took this over post-war. Nowhere for returnees so New Towns arose leaving older estates with older residents.

Churches planned with little understanding of these communities and no assessment. 1960s still vast worship centres for non-existent congregations and little facilities for social work – Jeffrey Harris (Methodist Home Mission report 1977) spoke of Methodist policies of 1960, “provided building and minister for over 10K with expectation of self-sustaining congregation within a measurable term of years.” Resources simply not there for that – and this leaves locals with sense of failure. “TO be expected to be both self-supporting and able to fulfil the same expectations as a church in suburbia shows what a painful lack of understanding those in leadership at that time had of housing estate churches and their context.” P25. Some say, then they should not have a church anyway – on that calculation we should have pulled out at Ceasarea Phillippi!. If church pulls out then judgement of the prophets. Churches are signs of hope in these areas – God cares!

“**Being at home in the culture of the place**”, says Newbiggin. To be one of them and feel comfortable to be so. Church often encourages people to be different, move on and out. Clergy can seem strangers in their midst. Committees for example where articulate dominate. Form filling for a project can be too daunting, and time consuming so rarely do CUF get applications. [Check this!] Paternalism and rejection. “Successful” are obsessed by numbers, being aggressive in the market place of souls, without alternative view getting on agenda.

Ecumenism: too busy and tired. Biblical and theological reasons but on estate its life-saving. LEPS, AEEs etc. often stalled by denominational expectations from top.

3. MINISTERS AND MINISTRY

Fingers crossed approach to appointments. Sometimes a deep lack of commitment. Often probationers appointed prior to more prestigious job. Little specialist training. “If I had known when I came what I know now I would have done it all so differently.” [Check out John Lee figures for choosing HEs] Work is isolating and not easily defined, not supported by circuit, not understood by others. Often put with wealthier church with potential which is given more time – we pay for it! Then the cleric tries to be two different people – unsuccessfully. Often lives off estate, or next door to church as if caretaker, a target for vandals with no immediate neighbours. Family suffer. Private schooling? Don’t stay long enough. Short term you have to do the job yourself before building locals’ ability long-term – can even “crucify an experienced hand”

Jeffrey Harris & Peter Jarvis: The Church in the Council Housing Estate, 1977.

1. Specialised training: (GPs need Consultant specialists) Centres after ordination if necessary.
2. Longer appointments: feel same pressures as locals – to be authentically incarnate.
3. Fully supported locally – financially too.
4. Not stretched by other duties
5. Live on the estate

Collaborative Ministry essential!

Laity often separated off from decisions. Team ministry should be inclusive: [Body of Christ language]

1. Ministry of whole people of God
2. Working with, not for
3. Joint leadership and responsibility of gifts
4. Mutual acceptance as partners – not delegation
5. Joint consultation
6. Recognising and enhancing others’ gifts
7. Agreeing roles together.

But this is often contrary to their training, too challenging to low self-esteem, some want to be martyr, don’t realise their gifts on a par, means self-limitation for good of whole, submitting to lay leadership, demands efficiency and success.

At heart all about relationships

1. Loyalty: not rated off the estate. It tells them they are worth, and offers safety
2. Affirmation: They matter, always been discounted as irrelevant.]
3. Empowering: to know they have a gift which is needed!
4. Trust: relationships often broken. Trust creates trust.
5. Love: Cannot function at a superficial level – embracing.
6. Acceptance: warts and all is the estate way.

Dependency destroys self-worth

Entrusting others means lack of efficiency and effectiveness – not affirmed by diocese!

Not only are ordained set free by this approach but so are laity, to engage in their proper ministry.

4. TWO ESTATES: DAGENAHM AND CHELMSLEY WOOD

Old Methodist congregational structures giving everyone a place.

5. MISSION ON THE ESTATE

Church got itself into self-concern for ministry not mission. Agonised.

Jesus did not seem to try to 'win' followers: His ministry was to wash feet, His mission was to preach Good News to poor. [The Jews had old expectations of Messiahship and we do likewise!! He will come and save the *Church!*]

Luke 9 – sends out 12 not to gain converts but preach Kingdom and heal sick. Not to conform to society's anxieties about itself, but transform it.

Liberation:

To enable people to have the sort of life he meant them to have, free from enslavement.

Affirmation, Healing, Renewal of individuals and communities, Restoration of Christian values for society and economics etc, Recognition as children of God, Helping people find God.

Mission Strategy:

1. Identify with estate people. No them and us between church and its surroundings.
[Tribalism can be put to use to give identity and togetherness. Not Essenes!]
2. Take people seriously: importance of folk religion, rites of passage, not judgemental
3. Church must be consistent:

Models of Church can muddle us and the community:

- a. Communal Church, like CofE
- b. Associational Church, like Methodist
- c. Ideological Church like Baptist or Pentecostal
- d. Symbolic Church like RC.

Often a combination, but if we suddenly change into ideological church as CofE has, the brand is muddled, and locals don't know if it can be trusted.

4. Reflect life and ethos of estate:

Most church is middle-class. Worship is not very physical contact sport but static and wordy, visual and lively, too sophisticated, "what was that all about?"

Church life should reflect local concerns – living conditions, aspirations, groups and meetings.

5. Celebrate Diversity:

Not colour-blind. Race and tradition, accepting all round.

6. Church must mission together:

Divisions stymie mission – Lundt principle.

Circuit and Deanery alongside local estate church, recognising special pressures, giving priority, being One Holy Catholic and Apostolic

7. Mission is working with God.

He has entrusted us

EPILOGUE

Majority hard working, not to blame for conditions.

Housing estates are not God-forsaken

God is there – work alongside God.

Positive discrimination towards poor.